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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000214

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR CGURNEY
PARIS FOR CNEARY
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: HARARE RESIDENTS CLASH WITH RIOT POLICE

REF: A) HARARE 77 B) HARARE 42

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

1. (U) Riot police on January 29 clashed with several hundred Harare residents gathered in the city center for a meeting with Mayor of Harare Elias Mudzuri, who represents the opposition MDC. The meeting had been planned -- and well-publicized -- more than a week in advance, and was to discuss the variety of challenges facing the city, including water shortages. The DATT and polooffs were prevented from entering Town House by a senior police officer, who advised them that the meeting had been cancelled and they should summon their driver to collect them. Others who arrived for the same meeting were told the same thing. A walk around the block revealed a heavy deployment of approximately 75 riot police -- many of them equipped with helmets, AK-47's, tear gas canisters, and batons. A crowd comprising hundreds of mostly young men gathered outside the gate which encircled Town House. A confrontation soon ensued inside the gates between an individual apparently angry that people were not being admitted and the senior police officer. The crowd quickly became agitated at the police's manhandling of this individual, jeering at the officers involved and throwing bottles, stones, and bricks. The police responded immediately by firing tear gas into the crowd, which dispersed quickly.

2. (U) The Mayor subsequently told us that police had authorized him to hold the meeting so long as it occurred inside, not on the front steps as planned. The police, however, cancelled it at the last minute, citing concerns about the Mayor's safety. After the situation calmed down, police asked the Mayor to accompany them to the Harare Central police station, but he declined to do so, instead returning to his office. As of 4:00 p.m. on January 29, police were still milling around outside his office, and Mudzuri was bracing himself for his second arrest in two weeks (ref A), although it is unclear what the police would charge him with.

3. (C) Comment: MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai's special advisor told us that the MDC had devised this meeting as a legitimate reason to convene large numbers of disgruntled residents in the city center. The police clearly considered it a provocation and demonstrated their determination to quash any protests by deploying in large numbers and with overwhelming force. Although the turnout of residents was impressive, the crowd's rapid dispersal at the first sign of danger could not have been an encouraging sign for those in the MDC advocating mass action as the principal means of confronting the GOZ. Mayor Mudzuri is beginning to gain quite a following from those pleased with his in-your-face stance toward the Government and its tactics of intimidation, as more Zimbabweans -- including some in the MDC -- begin to question the effectiveness of Morgan Tsvangirai's quieter approach.

SULLIVAN